

Child Temperament as a Moderator for the Outcomes of Corporal Punishment: A Sibling Comparison Analysis

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Introduction

- While numerous studies have suggested that corporal punishment (CP) is associated with adverse developmental outcomes (Gershoff & Grogan-Kaylor, 2016), the conclusions that can be drawn from these studies have been challenged due to uncontrolled confounding variables (Baumrind, Larzelere, & Cowan, 2002; Ferguson, 2013; Larzelere & Kuhn, 2005).
- Sociodemographic and genetic factors may have influenced both the use of CP and the development of behavior problems in childhood and adolescence.
- Past studies have not always accounted for individual differences (e.g., temperament, personality) among children who receive CP.
- Furthermore, it is necessary to study outcomes of CP **within the context of individual differences** among children while also controlling for extraneous genetic and environmental confounds.
- Studies have suggested that children with difficult temperaments are differentially susceptible to rearing influences compared to their peers (Belsky et al., 2007). Therefore, children with difficult temperaments may experience poorer outcomes when exposed to CP.

Research Questions

- Do children who receive CP exhibit higher levels of internalizing and externalizing problem behaviors compared to children who do not receive CP?
- Among children who receive CP, do children with difficult temperaments show higher levels of internalizing and externalizing problem behaviors compared to children with moderate temperaments?
- Do these associations hold when controlling for genetic and environmental factors (i.e., comparing biological siblings)?

Methods

- We examined data collected from 11,508 biological children born to a nationally representative group of women who participated in the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth.
- Multilevel modeling as implemented in Mplus 7.31 was used to estimate population and within-family associations comparing biological siblings.

Measures

- A shortened version of the Home Observation Measurement of the Environment (HOME; Caldwell & Bradley, 1984) was used to assess mothers' **use of corporal punishment**.
- **Child fussy temperament** was measured during children's first two years of life by maternal reports using items from the Infant Behavior Questionnaire (IBQ; Rothbart, 1981).

Measures (Cont.)

- Mothers completed the Behavior Problem Index (BPI; Peterson & Zill, 1986) to report their children's **internalizing behavior problems** (e.g., anxiety, difficulty concentrating, depression) and **externalizing behavior problems** (e.g., disobedience, arguing, loss of temper) between the ages of 4 and 9.
- Behavioral outcomes between the ages of 14 and 17 were assessed using two self-report measures:
 - The Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression scale (CES-D; Radloff, 1977) was used to assess **internalizing problem behaviors**.
 - **Externalizing problem behaviors** were measured using the Self-Report of Delinquency scale (SRD; Elliot & Huizinga, 1983).

Results

Table 1
Unstandardized coefficients from sibling comparison model.

Outcome Variables	Predictor Variables		
	Corporal Punishment (CP)	Temperament (T)	CP x T
Internalizing Problem Behaviors	.003	.012*	-.003
Externalizing Problem Behaviors	.025***	.016**	-.004
Delinquency	.005	-.020	-.020
Depression	-.192**	-.324**	.027

* $p < .10$; ** $p < .05$; *** $p < .01$

Results (Cont.)

- Siblings who received higher levels of CP were significantly more likely to exhibit externalizing problems behavior between the ages of 4 and 9 and were significantly less likely to report symptoms of depression in adolescence.
- Siblings who were reported as exhibiting higher levels of fussy temperament during infancy were significantly more likely to exhibit internalizing and externalizing problem behaviors between the ages of 4 and 9 and were significantly less likely to report symptoms of depression in adolescence.
- No CP x Temperament interactions were found to be significant, suggesting that temperament is not a moderator for the outcomes of CP.

Conclusions & Future Directions

- These results suggest that CP may be associated with higher levels of externalizing problem behaviors even when controlling for genetic and environmental factors.
- Further research is necessary in order to understand the specific variables responsible for the association between CP and problem behaviors.